

Amendments to the Claims:

The listing of claims below will replace all prior versions of claims in the application; applicants are canceling Claims 1-30, 54 and 55.

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-30 (Cancel)

Claim 31 (original): An apparatus for disabling a telephone ringer comprising:

a light sensing device operable to produce a signal indicative of a level of ambient light;

a recording device operable to play back a recording to a calling party, the recording prompting the calling party to provide indicia that the call is a priority call; and

a controller communicating with the light sensing device and the recording device, the controller being operable to receive the signal and both (i) to disable the telephone ringer, and (ii) enable the recording device such that the recording device may play back the recording to the calling party, when the signal indicates that the ambient light has reached a predetermined level. the controller being operable to initiate an emergency sequence when the indicia indicates that the call is a priority call.

Claim 32 (original): The apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the emergency sequence includes enabling the telephone ringer irrespective of whether the signal indicates that the ambient light has reached the predetermined level.

Claim 33 (original): The apparatus according to claim 31, further comprising an alert device in communication with the controller, the controller

activating the alert device when the indicia indicates that the call is a priority call.

Claim 34 (original): The apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the recording prompts the calling party to press a telephone keypad button to indicate that the call is a priority call, the controller being operable to recognize the pressed telephone keypad button such that the emergency sequence is initiated.

Claim 35 (original): The apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the recording device is operable to receive and retain a message from the calling party.

Claim 36 (original): The apparatus according to claim 31, wherein the controller is operable to disable the telephone ringer and enable the recording device when the signal indicates that the ambient light has fallen below a predetermined threshold.

Claim 37 (original): The apparatus according in claim 31, wherein the light sensing device is taken from the group consisting of a photovoltaic cell, a photo-transistor and a photo-resistor.

Claim 38 (original): The apparatus according in claim 31, wherein the light sensing device, recording device and controller are external to the telephone and the controller is operable to couple between a telephone line and an input connection of the telephone.

Claim 39 (original): The apparatus according in claim 31, wherein the light sensing device and controller are integral with the telephone.

Claim 40 (original): An apparatus for disabling a telephone ringer comprising:

a light sensing device operable to produce a first signal indicative of a level of ambient light;

a timing-device operable to produce a second signal indicative of a timing condition;

a recording device operable to play back a recording to a calling party, the recording prompting the calling party to provide indicia that the call is a priority call; and

a controller communicating with the light sensing device, the timing device and the recording device, the controller being operable to receive the first and second signals and both (i) disable the telephone ringer, and (ii) enable the recording device such that the recording device may play back the recording to the calling party, when either (i) the first signal indicates that the ambient light has reached a predetermined level, or (ii) the second signal indicates that a predetermined timing condition has been satisfied, the controller being operable to initiate an emergency sequence when the indicia indicates that the call is a priority call.

Claim 41 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the emergency sequence includes enabling the telephone ringer irrespective of whether either of the first and second signals indicates that the telephone ringer should be disabled.

Claim 42 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, further comprising an alert device in communication with the controller, the controller activating the alert device when the indicia indicates that the call is a priority call.

Claim 43 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the recording prompts the calling party to press a telephone keypad button to indicate that the call is a priority call, the controller being operable to recognize the pressed telephone keypad button such that the emergency sequence is initiated.

Claim 44 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the recording device is operable to receive and retain a message from the calling party.

Claim 45 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the controller is operable to disable the telephone ringer and enable the recording device when the signal indicates that the ambient light has fallen below a predetermined threshold

Claim 46 (original): The apparatus according in claim 40, wherein the light sensing device is taken from the group consisting of a photovoltaic cell, a photo-transistor and a photo-resistor.

Claim 47 (original): The apparatus according in claim 40, wherein the light sensing device, timing device, recording device and controller are external to the telephone and the controller is operable to couple between a telephone line and an input connection of the telephone.

Claim 48 (original): The apparatus according in claim 40, wherein the light sensing device, timing device and controller are integral with the telephone.

Claim 49 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the timing device is operable to provide the second signal to the controller to indicate that the telephone ringer is to be sequentially disabled and enabled at periodic pre-set times.

Claim 50 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the timing device is operable to provide the second signal to the controller to indicate that the telephone ringer is to be sequentially disabled and enabled at varying times on varying days.

Claim 51 (original): The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein the timing device is integral with the controller.

Claim 52 (previously presented): An apparatus for disabling a telephone ringer comprising:

a recording device operable with a telephone to play back an instruction recording to a calling party, the recording prompting the calling party to provide designated signal that the calling party's call is a priority call; and

a controller communicating with said recording device, said controller being operable

- (i) to disable the telephone ringer, and
- (ii) to enable the recording device such that the recording device may play back said instruction recording to a calling party, the controller being operable after a calling party provides said designated signal to initiate an emergency sequence and re-enable the ringer when said signal from the calling party indicates that the calling party's call is a priority call.

Claim 53 (previously presented): The apparatus according to Claim 52, wherein the recording prompts the calling party to speak a designated command to indicate that the call is a priority call, the controller being operable to recognize said spoken designated command such that said emergency sequence is initiated.

Claims 54 and 55 (Cancel)

Claim 56 (previously presented): Apparatus operable with a telephone including a ringer and a telephone answering device (TAD), comprising:

- (i) a controller adapted for connection with said telephone and said TAD for selectively disabling the telephone ringer and connecting the TAD to receive the call and to deliver a playback message to the caller with instruction for the caller to override the ringer disablement so that the telephone will ring if said call is a priority

call,

(ii) said TAD adapted to provide an instruction to the caller to use his/her telephone key pad or to speak into his phone microphone a designated code indicating that the calling party's call is a priority call,

said controller, when it receives said code, adapted to override said disablement of said ringer and allow said call to activate said ringer so that the call can be received,

(iii) a timing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a first signal indicative of a preselected timing condition (such as 11:00 PM turn off time) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback, and

(iv) a light sensing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a second signal indicative of a preselected level of ambient light (such as lights out or darkness condition) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback,

said controller adapted for the following conditions:

(a) where said timing device is activated and said light sensing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said first signal from said timing device and to disable said ringer, or

(b) where said light sensing device is activated and said timing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said second signal from said light sensing device and to disable said ringer, or

(c) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said first signal (such as 11:00PM turn off time) and to disable said

ringer, but to disregard said first signal if the second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) is not yet been received, or

(d) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) and to disable said ringer, but to disregard said second signal if said first signal has not yet been received, or

(e) where neither said timing device nor said light sensing device is activated, to respond to manual switching to disable said ringer.

Claim 57 (previously presented): A telephone answering system, comprising:

(i) a telephone including a ringer,
(ii) a telephone answering device (TAD), and
(iii) a controller adapted for connection with said telephone and said TAD for selectively disabling the telephone ringer and connecting the TAD to receive the call and to deliver a playback message to the caller with instruction for the caller to override the ringer disablement so that the telephone will ring if said call is a priority call,

said TAD adapted to provide an instruction to the caller to use his/her telephone key pad or to speak into his phone microphone a designated code indicating that the calling party's call is a priority call,

said controller, when it receives said code, adapted to override said disablement of said ringer and allow said call to activate said ringer so that the call can be received,

(iv) a timing device electronically coupled to said controller and

operable to produce a first signal indicative of a preselected timing condition (such as 11:00 PM turn off time) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback, and

(v) a light sensing device electronically coupled to said controller and operable to produce a second signal indicative of a preselected level of ambient light (such as lights out darkness condition) for which said controller is to automatically disable said ringer and enable the TAD for providing its instruction playback,

said controller adapted for the following conditions:

(a) where said timing device is activated and said light sensing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said first signal from said timing device, or

(b) where said light sensing device is activated and said timing device is not activated, to receive and respond to said second signal from said light sensing device, or

(c) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said first signal (such as 11:00PM turn off time) and to disable said ringer, but to disregard said first signal if the second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) is not yet been received, or

(d) where both said timing device and said light sensing device are activated, to receive said second signal (such as lights out or darkness condition) electronically coupled to said controller and to disregard said second signal if said first signal has not yet been received, or

(e) where neither said timing device nor said light sensing device is activated, to respond to manual switching to disable said rings.

Claim 58 (previously presented): Apparatus according to Claim 56 wherein

Appl. No. 09/248,436
Amdt. dated December 4, 2003
Reply to Office Action of June 4, 2003

said timing device has a second preselected timing condition to automatically enable said disabled ringer.

Claim 59 (previously presented): Apparatus according to Claim 56 wherein said light sensing device has a second preselected level of ambient light to automatically enable said disabled ringer.